



# **THE 2014 BROAD PRIZE**

**Celebrating Progress in America's Public Schools**

## THE BROAD PRIZE FOR URBAN EDUCATION

The \$1 million Broad Prize for Urban Education, established in 2002, is the largest education award in the country given to school districts. The Broad Prize is awarded each year to honor urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color.

Each year, Broad Prize scholarships are awarded to graduating high school seniors in the finalist and winning districts who demonstrate a record of academic improvement during their high school careers and have a financial need. Seniors from the winning and finalist districts are eligible for two- or four-year scholarships of up to \$20,000 depending on the type of higher education institution they choose to attend. Since 2002, more than 1,200 students have received scholarships.

**“We have to get better. We have to get better faster. And that’s why I appreciate The Broad Prize.”**

**ARNE DUNCAN, U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION**

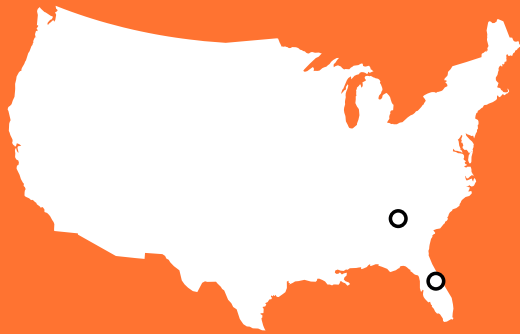




**“Our progress as  
a nation can be  
no swifter than  
our progress in  
education.”**

JOHN F. KENNEDY

## THE 2014 BROAD PRIZE FINALISTS



Gwinnett County  
Public Schools, Georgia

Orange County  
Public Schools, Florida

If Aesop were writing a fable about urban school systems today, he might have written about The Performer and The Improver.

This year's two Broad Prize districts are notable for two distinct reasons: Gwinnett County Public Schools has been a steady performer over nearly two decades, while Orange County Public Schools has accelerated its student performance in recent years with rapid improvement.

In the 13 years of The Broad Prize for Urban Education, never before have two finalists been as similar in size and demographics as Gwinnett County Public Schools and Orange County Public Schools—or as different in the path and pace they've taken to provide students with a quality education.

The stories behind these two districts and how they are working to ensure that every student—especially students of color and those from low-income families—has access to a quality public school that prepares him or her for college and beyond are stories worth telling.



## LETTER FROM THE BROAD PRIZE SELECTION JURY

It is my honor and privilege to write on behalf of the 2014 Broad Prize selection jury.

We convened this summer at the George W. Bush Presidential Center, graciously hosted by our fellow juror, Margaret Spellings. And we had quite a lively debate about this year's two Broad Prize finalists.

For the first time since 2002 when The Broad Prize was created, the review board of national education experts that evaluated the publicly available student achievement data for 75 of the largest school districts in America decided to name fewer than four or five finalists. They looked at 125 data analyses—how these districts performed, improved, closed achievement gaps and prepared their students for college—and they were largely underwhelmed. Their decision to name two finalists was a reflection of their overall disappointment with the progress in urban school districts, viewing it as incremental at best.

But Gwinnett County Public Schools outside Atlanta and Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Florida, stood out. They were performing or improving at a rate that surpassed other districts in their states. They had strong results on college-readiness measures, particularly for students of color.

Teams of researchers descended on this year's two finalist districts for a week to determine what practices and policies were behind their results. They interviewed more than 300 people—teachers, parents, students, principals, administrators, school board members, community representatives—and reviewed several thousand pages of documents.



What the data showed, backed by the practices identified by the researchers, was quite remarkable. Gwinnett County was a consistent performer while Orange County demonstrated impressive improvement in recent years. Which story, we asked ourselves, deserved to be shared with other districts around the country?

Gwinnett County won the 2010 Broad Prize after it was a finalist in 2009, and this was the first year the district was again eligible for the prize. So we were impressed that their performance had been sustained. We looked at their governance: both the superintendent and school board are among the longest-serving in the country, demonstrating community support for the district and its approach to educating students. At the helm since 1996, Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks has methodically pushed the district to adopt standards that were more rigorous than the state's. He led the district and the community around a common vision of universal support of teachers and their work in the classroom. With slow and steady work, the district is consistently one of the top performers in Georgia. But when it comes to improvement, Gwinnett has hit the "ceiling effect" for proficiency since its performance has been consistently high—but it is continuing to make gains with the number of students who are achieving at advanced proficiency levels.

Orange County has also benefitted from longstanding leadership. Ron Blocker served as superintendent for 12 years before turning the district over in 2012 to his hand-picked successor Barbara Jenkins, who herself attended Orange County Public Schools. In recent years, the district's leadership rallied the community around a single vision: "to be the top producer of successful students in the nation." Orange County's approach has been aggressive and urgent, buoyed by statewide policies that prioritize education and spur competition among Florida districts. Orange County has embarked on a major capital campaign, building smaller neighborhood schools and increasing the number of magnet schools. The district has dramatically scaled up AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), broadened enrollment policies for Advanced Placement courses, and actively identified students who demonstrate academic readiness for more rigorous courses.

In nine regression analyses—which compare each district's actual proficiency rates to expected results, given the district's poverty rates, across elementary, middle and high school performance and improvement in reading, math and science—Gwinnett outperformed expectations for performance 100 percent of the time in 2013, while Orange County increasingly outperformed expectations for improvement 100 percent of the time between 2010 and 2013. When it came to achievement gaps between black and white students, Orange County narrowed a higher percentage of its gaps but Gwinnett's gaps were among the smallest in its state. When it came to Advanced Placement courses and tests, between 2010 and 2013 Gwinnett had bigger increases in participation rates but Orange County had larger increases in passing rates.

We wrestled with performance versus improvement, considering a steady, consistent district that has demonstrated sustainable gains and an up-and-coming urban district that has galvanized an entire community around raising student achievement—quickly and dramatically.

In the end, we decided that both finalists deserved to win the 2014 Broad Prize. We hope their stories inspire you with both hope and practical application.

**Progress is possible, and we encourage you to learn from these districts, borrow the practices that are working for them, and visit them to gain a deeper understanding of how other systems across America can also raise student achievement and sustain it at high levels.**



**Edward G. Rendell**

*Former Governor of Pennsylvania*

#### **2014 BROAD PRIZE JURY MEMBERS**

**Henry Cisneros**

*Executive Chairman, CityView  
Former U.S. Secretary of Housing  
and Urban Development*

**Christopher Dodd**

*Chairman and CEO, Motion Picture  
Association of America, Inc.  
Former U.S. Senator from Connecticut*

**Donald Graham**

*Chairman and CEO, Graham Holdings  
(formerly The Washington Post Company)*

**James Hunt, Jr.**

*Chairman of the Board, James B. Hunt, Jr.  
Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy  
Former Governor of North Carolina*

**Michael Lomax**

*President and CEO,  
United Negro College Fund*

**Roderick Paige**

*Former U.S. Secretary of Education*

**Donna Shalala**

*President, University of Miami  
Former U.S. Secretary of Health  
and Human Services*

**Margaret Spellings**

*President, George W. Bush  
Presidential Center  
Former U.S. Secretary of Education*





**2014**

**BROAD PRIZE  
WINNER**

**Gwinnett County  
Public Schools,  
Georgia**





# Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia

## DISTRICT PROFILE

**169,150**  
STUDENTS

**#14**

RANK AMONG  
U.S. SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS BY  
ENROLLMENT

**132**  
SCHOOLS

**\$1.8**  
BILLION  
ANNUAL BUDGET

**11,580**  
TEACHERS

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

**31%**  
Black

**28%**  
White

**27%**  
Hispanic

**10%**  
Asian

**4%**  
Other /  
Multi-ethnic

**16%**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS

**55%**

ELIGIBLE FOR FREE  
AND REDUCED-PRICE  
SCHOOL LUNCH

*(Reflects 2013–14 school year data)*





When a snowstorm shut down Gwinnett County Public Schools in early 2014, the head custodian at Duluth High “could not get out of his driveway,” recalls Principal Anthony Smith. “He walked two miles to work so that he could begin clearing sidewalks” around the school’s perimeter because he knew students and teachers needed to be able to get to class.

The custodian’s dedication typifies the attitude of every employee at every level of this Georgia district, which operates under a frequently recited district-wide mantra introduced by the long-time superintendent: There are but two kinds of people in the district—those who teach, and those who support those who teach.

“And we’re often reminded that we don’t want to be in a third category,” Smith says.

The singular focus is paying off with consistently high student achievement across Gwinnett County Public Schools, which returned as a Broad Prize finalist in 2014, the first year it was eligible after winning the award in 2010.

The nation’s 14th-largest district, whose boundaries encompass more than a dozen cities and towns, has transformed dramatically in the past two decades. Fifty-five percent of the nearly 170,000 students attending Gwinnett schools come from low-income families, up from just 13 percent in 1996. Once a majority-white district, Gwinnett now serves white, Hispanic and black students in roughly equal measure, with a small but growing share of Asian students.

With its strategy of carefully guided, steady academic improvement that began in the mid-1990s, the district has managed to absorb demographic change while continuing to raise student achievement.

“We want every year to be successful, of course,” says Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks. “That is why we embarked almost two decades ago on a strategic direction that has led to many accomplishments in a school district that has continued to grow larger and more diverse with each passing year.”

While most districts struggle to get their students to proficiency, Gwinnett has pushed its students into advanced proficiency. In 2013, Gwinnett ranked in the top 20 percent of all Georgia districts for its low-income students performing at the highest achievement level on state tests in reading, math and science. Black students ranked in the top 10 percent statewide on the same measure. And Gwinnett boasted the highest SAT participation rate among the 75 large urban districts eligible for The Broad Prize, with 88 percent of seniors—and 90 percent of black seniors—taking the exam in 2013.

The district owes its gains to stable leadership, a strong system of professional and instructional development and data-driven decision-making.

### **Stability at the top**

Stability and careful, measured improvement are hallmarks of Gwinnett, beginning with Wilbanks. At the helm since 1996, Wilbanks is one of the longest-serving superintendents in the nation. The composition of the county school board hasn’t changed in nine years; one trustee has served since the Nixon administration.



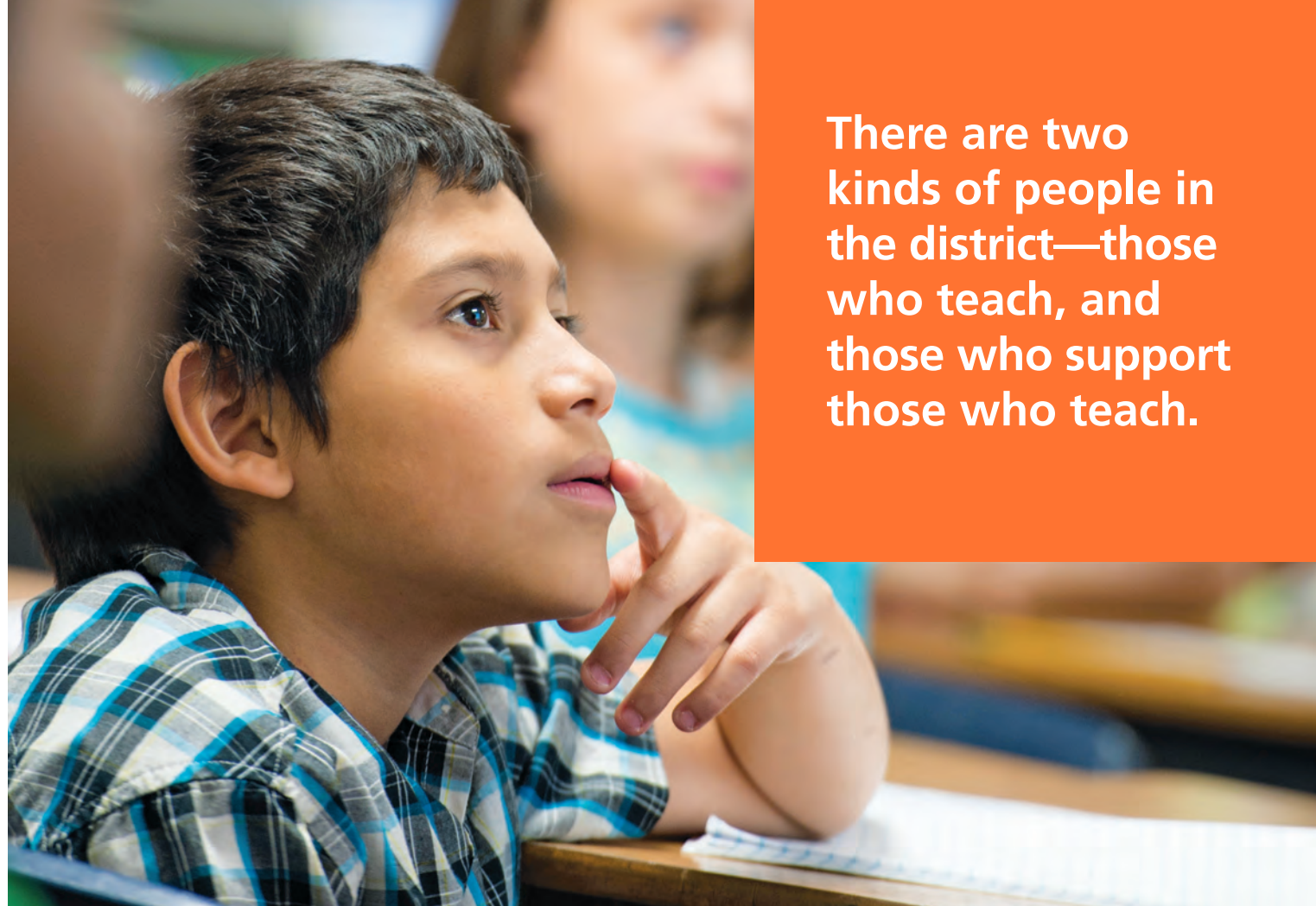
Working closely together with a smooth rhythm honed over two decades, Wilbanks and his senior leadership team have charted a course of slow but steady improvement. District leaders carefully vet and pilot new programs before scaling them district-wide. Wilbanks and his deputies keep performance and expectations high by using data to constantly build and refine longstanding initiatives.

“A strategic plan, you don’t use a clock for that; you don’t use a calendar,” Wilbanks is fond of saying. “You use a compass.”

A former teacher who speaks with a lilting Georgia twang, Wilbanks sets the tone for his district with a leadership style that is remarkably clear and consistent. Under his lead, even the smallest decisions are made with the overall strategy for the district in mind: Every action taken in Gwinnett supports the core focus of teaching and learning. When district leaders invested in the Reading Recovery program for struggling readers, they shifted money away from lesser priorities, such as lawn care and new carpeting.

Behind the broad grin and gentle colloquialisms, Wilbanks is all business. He works his administrators hard. “I’m not one who takes himself so seriously, but I take my work seriously,” he says. “If you want to get yourself in trouble with me, just slouch off on your job.”

Perhaps most indicative of Gwinnett’s stability is its triple-A bond rating, rare among large school districts and proof that Wilbanks



**There are two kinds of people in the district—those who teach, and those who support those who teach.**

and his team can be ambitious and highly supportive of educators without breaking the bank. During the Great Recession, Wilbanks made sure the district’s budget cuts did not include a single teacher layoff.

“I’m thinking the grass is green right here,” says Bron Gayna Schmit, principal of Simpson Elementary School in Peachtree Corners, Georgia. “I’m seeing the superintendent stay 18 years, and not two. I’m seeing them take care of you.”

### **Developing and supporting instructional leaders**

Principals like Schmit are devoted to Wilbanks’ vision in part because of the direct support he offers them—starting the day he hires them.

Wilbanks has hired all 132 Gwinnett principals into their current jobs, leading the final interviews himself. “He sits down across the table, eyeball to eyeball, and he makes clear what his expectations are,” says Kevin Tashlein, a former principal who is now an



associate superintendent. One expectation stands out: “Your school will get better, no matter what level you’re at.”

Many Gwinnett principals are the products of the district’s Quality-Plus Leader Academy, a year-long program led by Wilbanks and members of his senior staff. Launched in 2007, the academy teaches future school leaders the Gwinnett strategy for academic success, with separate tracks for candidates aspiring to be assistant principals or principals. Candidates collaborate in role-playing exercises that simulate school crises and compose planning documents for case-study schools.

“The whole program made you think like a principal,” says Lisa Marie Johnson, an

academy graduate who is now principal of Lawrenceville Elementary School. “I truly feel that it’s why I’ve been successful.”

Once principals start work in Gwinnett, they are each provided a mentor. Principals phone each other frequently to discuss common concerns. The organizational culture encourages administrators to share their challenges, rather than hide them. As a result of the support, turnover is low: Annual attrition among principals in recent years has been around 7 percent.

The district works to cultivate a strong team at all levels of the organization, not just for principals. While the “two kinds of people” mantra keeps the focus on teaching, professional development sessions ensure all employees—and especially classroom instructors—have student achievement at the center of their daily activities.

All new Gwinnett teachers are provided with mentors who model lessons, provide feedback and help identify instructional resources. Every teacher must complete at least 20 hours of professional development a year, but most do much more than that.

Teachers are evaluated annually on a four-point scale in the areas of lesson planning and delivery, student assessment, learning environment and professionalism. High-performing teachers are rewarded with shout-outs in faculty meetings and through a highly visible teacher-of-the-month program in some schools.

These efforts have contributed to an annual attrition rate of about 8 percent—markedly lower than the national average of 17 percent.

With the evaluations and support have come higher expectations for teachers and schools, implemented gradually with steady improvement over time. Not content to simply meet state standards, Gwinnett raised the bar and in 1997 rolled out its signature curriculum, Academic Knowledge and Skills, standardizing it across schools to simplify professional development and ensure that students who change schools learn the same material. The curriculum is now being aligned to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.

In 2005, the district developed Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies, a set of more than a dozen instructional rules that, if consistently followed, guarantee rigor in the classroom. One strategy states, “Explicitly teach students to summarize their learning.” Another says, “Use inquiry-based problem-solving learning strategies with students in all content areas.”

### **Making data count**

Tucked between bustling classrooms at Partee Elementary School is what teachers here call the data room—a room literally papered in data, its walls lined with color-coded index cards indicating reading levels and reading, math and writing scores for hundreds of students on dozens of tests. Established in 2010, Partee’s data room has been widely replicated across Gwinnett County.

At least once a month, Partee teachers gather around tables in this room, one grade level at a time, to meet with the principal and assistant principal and discuss the students behind the numbers. The ultimate aim is to make sure every child makes at least one full year of progress per year of instruction.

The approach is working. Several third-graders are approaching seventh-grade literacy, and one precocious kindergartener reads like a sixth-grader. Despite a student poverty rate rising five points a year in recent years to 75 percent in 2013, overall improvement at Partee on state tests was so notable that the school ascended in rank among Gwinnett elementary campuses from 70 to 12 in just four years.

Data drives every decision in the Gwinnett district. The district's Results-Based Evaluation System, in place since 1997, yields weighted school assessments that determine whether school goals are being met and whether students have mastered specific academic standards. The system's name speaks for itself: 70 percent of a principal's annual evaluation hinges on student achievement, as well as an unspecified portion of each teacher's evaluation. (Under a new statewide rule student achievement will count for roughly half of the annual teacher review.) All school-based staff are evaluated on performance goals. Principals or teachers who don't meet their goals might be required to undergo coaching or additional training. Underperformers are occasionally replaced,

but the evaluation system was designed to focus on improvement. Principals say the system keeps the district properly focused on student success.

The district's Enterprise Data Warehouse is a repository for statistics on student demographics and performance, including data on academic schedules, attendance and behavioral referrals and results from classroom tests, all updated nightly. Principals can access the warehouse to run reports for the school as a whole or for individual classrooms, sorting the data by subject or student subgroup. Teachers can create reports to map the progress of individual students or of an entire class in a particular content strand or subject area. Since 2012, all Gwinnett teachers have been required to monitor student learning with a series of occasional mini-tests that allow them to identify learning gaps and re-teach.

Most Gwinnett principals set aside time during the instructional day for teachers to plan and examine data together, freeing them to coach other teachers or help students when the school day ends. Principals also work hard to keep teachers onboard with new goals and strategies, such as fresh approaches to school improvement, asking for their input from day one.

At Lawrenceville Elementary School, where more than 90 percent of students receive federal meal subsidies, Principal Lisa Marie Johnson worked with her assistant superintendent to find data that showed not

how her students performed but how they *should* perform, relative to students at other high-poverty schools. Their conclusion: The school's students should be performing better.

Then, Johnson worked with the faculty to seed improvement at Lawrenceville Elementary. Teachers responded with legitimate reasons for the lagging scores: Parents don't get involved; students don't finish homework. Johnson told them to forget about things that were beyond their control. "And then we generated ideas," she says.

Teachers said they needed more support with struggling students. Johnson hired more instructional coaches, expanding the staff from two to nine. Now, she says, "I have instructional coaches on every grade level, and they're in every classroom, every single day."

Between 2010 and 2013, Lawrenceville students who exceeded expectations on state reading tests rose from 23 percent to 36 percent, and in math, they increased from 31 percent to 43 percent.

Gwinnett expects that measured, data-driven approach will pay off not just at one campus but for every school and every student.

"In any classroom in Gwinnett today, the teacher can call up their class roll and see a student's academic progress as of midnight the day before," says Wilbanks. "We think it's producing a better instructional program, a better climate for students." ■



**"In any classroom in Gwinnett today, the teacher can call up their class roll and see a student's academic progress as of midnight the day before. We think it's producing a better instructional program, a better climate for students."**

**SUPERINTENDENT J. ALVIN WILBANKS,  
GWINNETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**





A blurred background of a classroom with blue chairs and wooden desks. A black rectangular box is overlaid on the top left, and white text is overlaid on the bottom left.

**2014**

**BROAD PRIZE**

**WINNER**

**Orange County  
Public Schools,  
Florida**







# Orange County Public Schools, Florida

## DISTRICT PROFILE

**187,193**  
STUDENTS

**#10**

RANK AMONG  
U.S. SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS BY  
ENROLLMENT

**184**  
SCHOOLS

**\$1.8**  
BILLION  
ANNUAL BUDGET

**13,084**  
TEACHERS

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

**36%**  
Hispanic

**30%**  
White

**27%**  
Black

**5%**  
Asian

**2%**  
Other /  
Multi-ethnic

**13%**  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS

**60%**  
ELIGIBLE FOR FREE  
AND REDUCED-PRICE  
SCHOOL LUNCH

*(Reflects 2013–14 school year data)*



## In Timothy Flynn's U.S. history class at Oak Ridge High School in Orlando, Florida, 10th-graders haggle over line items in the federal budget with an enthusiasm befitting a far more scintillating topic.

"I believe in a strong military presence, because that's what keeps our nation free," says Joseph, eying a large sum on the projector.

"Nuclear ballistic missile-armed submarines?" protests Darcy, a partner in this political science exercise, shaking her head. "That's terrible, terrible, terrible."

"I'll give up on that one," Joseph responds—but only if Darcy will yield on raising the gas tax.

"If we tax gas," he argues, "the economy will fail, because people will drive less. Think on that right there. And I did give up my nuclear missiles."

Flynn walks from team to team, listening, breaking up logjams and gently reminding everyone of the looming deadline: "We've got 15 minutes till the government shuts down. You'd better start wheelin' and dealin'."

Half a decade ago, teachers taught lessons of this caliber in Orange County Public Schools—in individual schools, in individual classrooms. Today, rigor is evident everywhere in this first-time Broad Prize finalist district, where the emphasis on high standards and a challenging curriculum has translated into impressive student achievement results.

Orange County is a fast-moving district in a fast-growing county, one whose population has doubled in a generation as its namesake orange groves gave way to theme parks and suburban sprawl. Headquartered in the county seat of Orlando, the Orange County district has grown into the nation's 10th largest. More than half of the students served by the district are black or Hispanic, while 60 percent are low-income.

In just a few years Orange County has made marked academic improvement across nearly all grade levels and subjects. Between 2010 and 2013, the district narrowed ethnic and income achievement gaps. The gap between

Orange County's Hispanic students and white students elsewhere in Florida narrowed in elementary, middle and high school reading and science, and in elementary and high school math. Orange County's low-income students gained on higher-income students elsewhere in Florida in elementary, middle and high school reading and math, and in elementary and middle school science.

Orange County achieved those gains through a wide range of practices, including organizational coherence across the district that aligns the work of every employee to the goal of producing successful students, a relentless effort to build instructional capacity in schools and an exemplary data system for assessing student performance.

### **One vision, one voice**

Orange County's 184 schools all operate under a single mantra, "One vision, one voice," and a single mission—nothing less than "to be the top producer of successful students in the nation." The unity of effort across campuses and among the more than 13,000 Orange County teachers comes in large part from the district's methodical approach to strategic planning.

Developed with input and feedback from district and school leaders and other stakeholder groups, Orange County's latest strategic plan, spearheaded in 2011 by Superintendent Barbara Jenkins, then a deputy superintendent, includes not just goals but also new tools for evaluating each strategy. The plan includes a 27-item "scorecard" of district-wide performance

outcomes—everything from closing the achievement gap to filling seats on school buses, with measureable one- to five-year targets that push everyone in the district to higher levels of accomplishment. One five-year goal is for every school in the district to earn a letter grade of B or higher from the state based on student test scores.

The district augmented its strategic plan in 2013 following a diagnostic audit of the district's strengths and weaknesses funded in part by a grant from The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and conducted by a team of independent researchers. Orange County worked quickly to implement the team's recommendations, including a better balance of decision-making between the district office and schools, further increasing instructional rigor and enhancing a comprehensive database to store and track student achievement data.

The revised strategic plan, coupled with renewed strategic thinking after the diagnostic audit, ushered in an era of urgency and excellence in the district.

Superintendent Jenkins' experience facilitating the creation of the strategic plan has made her an ideal leader to put the plan into action. The Orange County School Board hired Jenkins to succeed 12-year superintendent Ronald Blocker. Jenkins has brought common textbooks to Orange County classrooms and a uniform pacing guide that sets out the content and timing of each lesson. She has centralized the task of selecting among the

myriad academic support programs available for struggling students.

"Five years ago, every teacher did what he or she thought was right in their own eyes," recalls Jenkins.

Before Jenkins started implementing the district's new strategic plan, she noticed, for example, that each principal was making independent decisions about purchasing academic intervention programs to help students with reading skills. As a result, the district's high schools used three dozen different programs—so many, Jenkins recalls, that principals didn't know which ones worked. The strategic plan narrowed the list to a half dozen programs, each one vetted and approved by a committee that included curriculum leaders, principals and reading coaches.

Under the strategic plan, school improvement in Orange County is moving at a brisk pace. Over the past four years, district leaders have adopted the Common Core State Standards and introduced a new teacher evaluation system that stresses rigor and high expectations for students. They have brought a heightened sense of urgency and new methods to the work of improving low-performing schools, sharpening instruction and readying students for college.

### **Success starts and ends with effective instruction**

On a recent morning at Palmetto Elementary School, one of the district's highest-poverty schools, students in fourth-grade teacher



Tiffany Payne's class puzzle over numerators and denominators, sitting in fours and writing excitedly on tablet-sized white boards.

Payne pauses frequently to ask questions that gauge whether the students understand the concepts she is teaching. She points to a word problem that includes the fraction  $1\frac{3}{4}$  and asks, "Does Lulu have one three-quarter loaf of bread, or does she have one and three-quarters loaves of bread?" The class then briefly explores how those statements are different.

Down the hall, children in Tiffany McRae's fourth-grade classroom sit on the floor exploring a similar concept, sorting fraction flash cards into equivalent groups:  $\frac{3}{4}$  next to  $\frac{6}{8}$  and so forth.



Orange County's 184 schools all operate under a single mantra, "One vision, one voice," and a single mission, "to be the top producer of successful students in the nation."



"We do a lot of team planning," which builds coherence in classroom instruction, says McRae. The focus on high-quality instruction includes teacher collaboration and supplemental help from instructional coaches and aides.

Palmetto's quest for increased rigor and instructional capacity is not unique to the school—it's part of a larger district-wide effort, driven by a comprehensive system of evaluation and support. In 2011, the

district introduced a powerful new model for evaluating teachers and students, designed by Colorado researcher Robert Marzano. In addition to providing a common language and several dozen specific strategies for effective classroom instruction, the Marzano framework has a core concept, replicated on every classroom wall in the district: a four-point scale of "mastery." The lowest rating, 1, might go to a student who can multiply a pair of fractions with help. A 2 means the student can perform the operations independently.

At 3, the student can use the technique to solve a word problem, and at 4, the student can teach the skill to a classmate.

Classroom observations are central to the Marzano system. Teachers undergo at least one formal and two informal observations per academic year, with less experienced or less effective teachers receiving as many as three formal and seven informal observations per year. Teachers are evaluated on such qualities as "centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement" and they use the feedback, uploaded into a central database for easy review by school and district administrators, to improve in specific areas of instruction. The system works partly because teachers regard it as encouraging professional growth rather than punishing failure.

To raise the quality of instruction at every school, the district sent extra support to help teachers at underperforming schools, which ranged in number from 15 to 44 in recent years. In 2011, curriculum experts began visiting struggling schools and observing classrooms monthly, following up with detailed feedback to teachers and principals. School leaders use that feedback, plus a deep analysis of student achievement data for each classroom, to set performance targets for teachers. Instructional coaches support teachers by providing training in reading and math interventions for struggling students.

### **Data as a compass**

Orange County's robust student assessment program goes far beyond Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).





**"By every objective  
measure, we have better  
schools today than we  
had four years ago."**

**SUPERINTENDENT BARBARA JENKINS,  
ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Teachers continuously monitor how well their students are mastering concepts and lessons through weekly, monthly and quarterly assessments. Their tools range from state tests and customized district-level exams to narrow five-item “testlets” that evaluate students on specific topics. The data is so specific that it not only tells teachers what a student got wrong but also which answer the student marked—so the teacher knows why a student came to an incorrect conclusion and how best to re-teach.

The results go into what Orange County calls its Educational Data Warehouse, updated daily, giving teachers quick access not only to assessment results but also to child-specific data such as reading level and poverty status. Area superintendents use the data to evaluate overall school performance, and principals examine the weekly progress of individual teachers. Teachers use the data to determine what lessons must be re-taught, how students should be grouped and which children might need extra help.

When Missty Honeycutt started teaching middle school science 11 years ago, “we didn’t even have online grade books.” Now, she says, “I can design a test, alone or with all the other teachers in my grade and subject.” After giving the test and uploading the scores, she can measure whether students

have mastered the material. “Sometimes you succeed, and sometimes you fail,” she says, “but data is always the compass.”

Allison Kirby, principal of Lockhart Middle School, remembers waiting days or weeks for the results of classroom assessments and then entering them into a spreadsheet by hand, to see “who went up and who went down.” Today, test results are instantaneous and student progress is color-coded in red, yellow or green.

Data doesn’t just help teachers become better instructors—it helps them identify students ready to take on more challenging material. Since 2012, the district has focused intensely on preparing students for college even in elementary school, launching several initiatives that share a common theme: All students who have potential should be moved ahead. The overarching goal is to increase the number of Orange County students who have access to the most rigorous and challenging coursework available and, ultimately, to raise the percentage of graduates who go on to college.

The district began screening all second-grade students for potential giftedness in the 2013-14 academic year, expanding a program first introduced at high-poverty schools. In middle schools, all seventh-graders who score well on state assessments are given the PSAT and

steered into an expanding program of advanced coursework. In high schools, all students are given the SAT, and those who score well are placed in Advanced Placement courses.

High schools have vastly expanded their AP portfolios, dropping a “gatekeeper” rule that had restricted the program to students recommended by their teachers. “If that student has AP potential, they are placed in an AP class,” says Douglas Guthrie, principal of Apopka High School.

The efforts are bearing fruit, and nowhere more so than in AP performance and participation.

Between 2011 and 2013, an increasing percentage of Orange County’s Hispanic juniors and seniors took Advanced Placement exams, while simultaneously increasing their passing rates—which usually decline as participation increases.

“By every objective measure,” Superintendent Jenkins says, “we have better schools today than we had four years ago.” ■



# 2014 Broad Prize Review Board

A distinguished group of the country's top educational leaders serves as the review board for The Broad Prize. Review board members examine performance indicators, demographic statistics and other information about the urban school districts that are eligible for The Broad Prize. Based on their examination, the review board narrowed the list of 75 eligible school districts to the two finalists.

**Christopher Cross**

*Chairman, Cross & Joftus  
Former U.S. Assistant Secretary  
of Education*

**Dan Goldhaber**

*Director, Center for Education  
Data & Research; Professor in  
Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences,  
University of Washington Bothell*

**Jane Hannaway**

*Vice President,  
American Institutes for Research  
Director, National Center for Analysis of  
Longitudinal Data in Education Research*

**Eric Hanushek**

*Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow,  
Hoover Institution of Stanford University*

**Karen Hawley Miles**

*President and Executive Director,  
Education Resource Strategies*

**Frederick Hess**

*Resident Scholar and Director  
of Education Policy Studies,  
American Enterprise Institute*

**Alexander "Sandy" Kress**

*Partner, Akin, Gump, Strauss,  
Hauer and Feld, L.L.P.*

**Patricia W. Levesque**

*Chief Executive Officer,  
Foundation for Excellence  
in Education; Executive Director,  
Foundation for Florida's Future*

**Deborah McGriff**

*Partner, NewSchools Venture Fund*

**Thomas W. Payzant**

*Board Chair, Carnegie Foundation  
for the Advancement of Teaching  
Former Superintendent, Boston  
Public Schools*

**Delia Pompa**

*Senior Vice President, Programs,  
National Council of La Raza*

**Margot Rogers**

*Vice Chairman and Senior Advisor,  
The Parthenon Group*

**John Simpson**

*Education Consultant,  
JOS Simpson and Associates  
Former Superintendent,  
Norfolk Public Schools, Virginia*

# The Broad Prize Partners

## RTI INTERNATIONAL

One of the nation's leading education research and consulting firms, Berkeley, California-based RTI International manages the rigorous and comprehensive quantitative data collection and analysis process for The Broad Prize.

## RMC RESEARCH CORPORATION

RMC Research Corporation is a nationally recognized research and professional services organization. Using a research-based rubric for district quality that was developed exclusively for The Broad Prize, RMC leads a site visit team of researchers and practitioners through the collection and analysis of interviews, documents and observations of Broad Prize finalist district practices.

**“Together, we have to seize this moment. We need to finally and fully bring about real equity in education.”**

**ARNE DUNCAN, U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION**

# Winners Circle

**2002**

*Houston Independent School District, Texas*

**2003**

*Long Beach Unified School District, California*

**2004**

*Garden Grove Unified School District, California*

**2005**

*Norfolk Public Schools, Virginia*

**2006**

*Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts*

**2007**

*New York City Department of Education, New York*

**2008**

*Brownsville Independent School District, Texas*

**2009**

*Aldine Independent School District, Texas*

**2010**

*Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia*

**2011**

*Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina*

**2012**

*Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida*

**2013**

*Houston Independent School District, Texas*

**2014**

*Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia*

*Orange County Public Schools, Florida*

To learn more about the best practices in this year's Broad Prize-winning districts, please contact:

**Gwinnett County Public Schools**

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